

Culturally Relevant Making Inside and Outside of the Classroom: Empowering Students Through Hands-On Learning Experiences

In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, the importance of culturally relevant teaching and learning practices has gained widespread recognition. Culturally relevant making, a transformative approach that empowers students by fostering their connections to their culture and community through hands-on learning experiences, has emerged as a powerful tool for engaging and inspiring students from all backgrounds.



Techno-Vernacular Creativity and Innovation: Culturally Relevant Making Inside and Outside of the Classroom

by Nettrice R. Gaskins

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Culturally relevant making is grounded in the belief that students learn best when they are able to connect their learning to their own experiences and cultural contexts. By incorporating culturally relevant content, perspectives, and materials into making activities, educators can create learning environments that are inclusive, equitable, and empowering for all students.

Principles of Culturally Relevant Making

- **Building on students' cultural strengths:** Culturally relevant making acknowledges the unique knowledge, skills, and experiences that students bring to the classroom and leverages these strengths as a foundation for learning.
- **Centering student voice:** Students are given opportunities to share their own perspectives, experiences, and cultural narratives through making activities.
- **Fostering student agency:** Students are empowered to make choices and take ownership of their learning process.
- **Connecting making to real-world contexts:** Making activities are designed to address real-world problems and challenges, making learning more meaningful and relevant to students.
- **Promoting collaboration and community:** Making activities often involve collaboration and teamwork, fostering a sense of community and belonging among students.

Benefits of Culturally Relevant Making

Culturally relevant making has been shown to have a range of benefits for students, including:

- **Increased student engagement:** By connecting learning to their own experiences and cultural contexts, culturally relevant making captivates students' attention and motivates them to actively participate in learning.

- **Improved academic achievement:** Studies have shown that culturally relevant making can lead to improved academic outcomes, particularly in STEM subjects.
- **Enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills:** Making activities require students to apply critical thinking, problem-solving, and creative thinking skills to address real-world challenges.
- **Increased cultural awareness and sensitivity:** Culturally relevant making fosters cultural awareness and sensitivity by exposing students to diverse perspectives and cultural practices.
- **Greater self-confidence and empowerment:** By empowering students to share their own voices and perspectives, culturally relevant making builds their self-confidence and sense of agency.

Examples of Culturally Relevant Making

Culturally relevant making can be implemented in a variety of ways, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Inside the Classroom

- **Engineering design projects:** Students design and build projects that address real-world problems in their own communities, such as designing sustainable housing solutions for low-income families.
- **Art and design projects:** Students create art and design projects that reflect their cultural heritage and explore contemporary social issues, such as creating murals that depict the history and culture of their neighborhood.

- **Performance projects:** Students write, perform, and produce plays, dances, and other performances that explore cultural themes and narratives.
- **Digital storytelling projects:** Students use digital storytelling tools to create videos and podcasts that share their own stories and experiences.

Outside the Classroom

- **Community-based projects:** Students partner with community organizations to address real-world problems, such as creating a community garden or developing a mentorship program.
- **Maker spaces:** Maker spaces provide students with access to tools and equipment that they can use to create their own projects, often with a focus on STEM education.
- **Cultural field trips:** Field trips to museums, cultural centers, and historical sites can provide students with opportunities to learn about and engage with diverse cultures.
- **Mentorships:** Mentorships with community members who are experts in their fields can provide students with insights and support as they explore their cultural heritage and develop their making skills.

Transformative Impact of Culturally Relevant Making

Culturally relevant making has the potential to transform the lives of students by empowering them to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, and agents of change in their communities. By embracing culturally relevant making practices, educators can create inclusive and equitable

learning environments that foster student engagement, academic achievement, and overall well-being.

As educators, we have a responsibility to recognize and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of our students. By incorporating culturally relevant making into our teaching practices, we can create learning experiences that are meaningful, empowering, and transformative for all students.



Culturally relevant making is a powerful approach to teaching and learning that empowers students by fostering their connections to their culture and community through hands-on learning experiences. By embracing the principles of culturally relevant making, educators can create inclusive and equitable learning environments that engage students, improve academic

outcomes, and promote cultural awareness and sensitivity. Culturally relevant making has the potential to transform the lives of students by empowering them to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, and agents of change in their communities.



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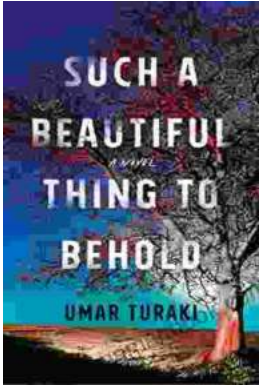
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